

Application No. 09/956,912  
Amendment filed 9-22-03  
Reply to Office Action of May 22, 2003

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of the present application is respectfully requested.

Claim 24 remains active in the application. Claim 24 has been amended for clarity to recite that each of a number of connecting pipes having a minimum inner diameter and a number of the connecting pipes having a maximum inner diameter are smaller than a number of the connecting pipes having inner diameters other than the minimum and maximum inner diameters.

Claim 24 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being obvious over the newly cited JP '798 in view of the U.S. patent to Worton. However, this rejection is respectfully traversed.

According to a feature of the invention set forth in the claim, in a method of connecting refrigerant pipes of a multi-unit type air conditioner, for a group of connecting pipes and a branch pipe joint body having been packed in one package, each of a number of connecting pipes having a minimum inner diameter and a number of the connecting pipes having a maximum inner diameter are smaller than a number of the connecting pipes having inner diameters other than the minimum and maximum inner diameters. Therefore, at the work site, the worker has flexibility in selecting the connecting pipe whose diameter matches the refrigerant pipes to be connected.

JP '798 was only considered to be a background technology (classification "A") reference in the European search report. This may have been due to the fact that *all of the refrigerant pipes to be connected in this reference have the same diameter*. The Examiner has also recognized one of the weaknesses in this reference: since all of the refrigerant pipes

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to be connected in this reference have the same diameter, it lacks a teaching that each of a number of connecting pipes having a minimum inner diameter and a number of the connecting pipes having a maximum inner diameter are smaller than a number of the connecting pipes having inner diameters other than the minimum and maximum inner diameters (Office Action, p. 5). The Examiner has therefore instead relied upon Worton to teach the obviousness of this feature in JP '798. However, this reliance is misplaced.

Worton is directed to a water pump supplied with a plurality of outlet fittings 58-68 so that the pump can be connected to a variety of hoses such as 72 and 76. The Examiner alleges that the connectors 66 and 68 have smallest and largest inner diameters, and that the remainder of the connectors have diameters other than the smallest and largest inner diameters. The Examiner further alleges that it would have been obvious in view of Worton to have provided JP '798 with a number of connecting pipes having a minimum inner diameter and a number of the connecting pipes having a maximum inner diameter that are smaller than a number of the connecting pipes having inner diameters other than the minimum and maximum inner diameters. However, the obviousness of this modification fails on at least two bases.

First, those skilled in the art would not have found it obvious to have modified JP '798 in view of Worton. JP '798 is a refrigerant pipe joint, while Worton is a water pump. Those skilled in the art would not have expected that teachings with respect to water pumps would be applicable to refrigerant pipe joints. Also, all of the branch connections of JP '798 have the same diameter — there would be no need in this reference to even have connecting pipes of different diameters, even if this were known in the art.

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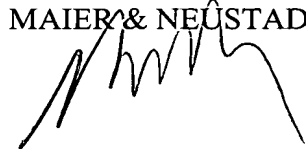
Second, it is incorrect that Worton teaches that each of a number of connecting pipes having a minimum inner diameter and a number of the connecting pipes having a maximum inner diameter are smaller than a number of the connecting pipes having inner diameters other than the minimum and maximum inner diameters. **There is no description in Worton of the *inner* diameters of the connectors 58-68.** Thus there is no basis for alleging that Worton can provide the teaching missing from JP '798. Claim 24 therefore defines over any combination of these references.

Claim 24 has been amended in conformance with paragraph 2 Of the Office Action.

Applicant therefore believes that the present application is in a condition for allowance and respectfully solicits an early Notice of Allowability.

Respectfully submitted,

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